

Introduction

In our 2008 *Seeds of Peace Care of Creation and Climate Change Chapter Act*, we committed ourselves personally and communally to:

- ☞ deepen our spirituality of peace regarding care of creation
- ☞ identify and reduce our carbon footprint in our communities, ministries and institutions
- ☞ pray, study and act to promote a sustainable lifestyle
- ☞ participate in legislative efforts to support the integrity of creation
- ☞ stand in solidarity and act in justice with marginalized people whose lives are already affected by the devastation of Earth
- ☞ collaborate with others, including interfaith and civic groups who are addressing climate change.



Two Paths to Follow

The CSJP Care of Creation and Climate Change (C4) Core Group has identified two topics, or paths to follow, as we engage this Chapter Act as a community over the next five years: **Sustainable Lifestyle** and **Climate Change/Global Warming/Carbon Footprint**. Over the coming months, we will continue to gather resources and develop processes and materials to share with the whole Congregation.

Invitation

Our Chapter Acts are the commitment of the entire Congregation. The C4 Core Group invites each Sister and Associate to use this Prayer, Study and Action Guide as an entry point for engaging this Chapter Act.

Pray

- ☞ Pray the Copenhagen Prayer (page 2) daily between now and December 18
- ☞ Use the Readings and Reflection Questions (page 2) to deepen your spirituality and commitment to this Chapter Act

Study

- ☞ Read and reflect on both the “Climate Change 101” and “Sustainability Primer” resources (pages 3-5)
- ☞ Pay attention to stories in the news about climate change, the Copenhagen Summit and sustainability

Act

- ☞ Take action in support of the Copenhagen Climate Change Summit by following one or more of the action suggestions (page 6)
- ☞ Commit to having at least one conversation with family, friends, colleagues or other CSJPs about climate change and the Copenhagen Climate Summit

Readings

Today I set before you life or death. Choose life, that you and your descendants may live. ~*Deut. 30:19*

Earth is a revelation of God and the sustainer of all life. We recognize that the exploitation and destruction of Earth's air, water, soil and species is a sacrilege. We are committed to a spirituality of peacemaking which compels us to live in right relationship with the entire community of life. In this way, 'we engage in the struggle against the reality of evil and continue the work of establishing God's reign of justice and peace.'
~*Acts of the 21st General Chapter, Constitutions 2*

'Our history calls us to a special love of those who are poor.' Margaret Anna Cusack (Mother Clare) made the connection between the devastation of Earth and the victims of famine....Recognizing the interdependence of all life, we count among those who are poor all Earth's creatures whose lives are threatened or diminished. We experience our call to live our stance of contemplative, nonviolent peacemaking in regard to creation. It is faithfulness to this charism in our own time that compels us to respond to the crisis of climate change/global warming. ~*Acts of the 21st General Chapter, Constitutions 21*

The Earth is indeed a precious gift of the Creator who, in designing its intrinsic order, has given us learnings that guide us as stewards of creation. Precisely from this framework, the Church considers matters concerning the environment and its protection intimately linked to the theme of integral human development....With these sentiments, I wish to encourage all the participants in the United Nations summit to enter into their discussions constructively and with generous courage. Indeed, we are all called to exercise responsible stewardship of creation...and to develop that covenant between human beings and the environment which should mirror the creative love of God.
~*Pope Benedict XVI*

The climate change crisis is the greatest humanitarian and development issue facing the world today. ~*Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the United Nations*

Reflection Questions

- ☞ "We are called to ... develop that covenant between human beings and the environment which should mirror the creative love of God." What does this quote of Pope Benedict mean to you? How does this call resonate in your heart and mind?
- ☞ "It is faithfulness to this charism in our own time that compels us to respond to the crisis of climate change/global warming." As you learn more about the climate change crisis, what is stirring in your heart? How might this impact our actions, prayer, discussion and decisions as a Congregation without provinces?

Prayer for Copenhagen

Creator God and Sustainer of Life, we recognize that the exploitation and destruction of Earth's air, water, soil and species is a sacrilege. We pray for world leaders to agree to a new and just treaty in Copenhagen that will protect our fragile world for future generations. Amen

What is the difference between climate change and global warming?

Climate change refers to any long term significant shift in the average weather of a region or the planet, as measured by changes in average temperature, precipitation and wind patterns. According to the World Meteorological Organization, the change has to be evident for at least three decades.

Global warming refers specifically to the increase in average temperature of the Earth's near surface air and oceans, due to natural or human activity.

Respect for life and for the dignity of the human person extends also to the rest of creation.

*Pope John Paul II,
Ecological Crises:
A Common Responsibility, 1989*

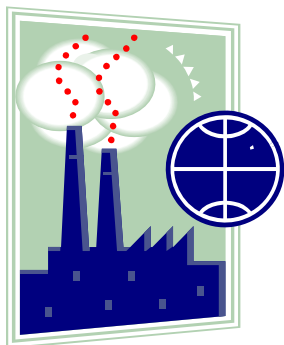
Climate change has become the preferred term since it includes other changes in our weather besides rising temperatures. The overwhelming majority of the world's scientists, including the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), agree that climate change is occurring. The IPCC's years of research show that, while natural factors have contributed to climate change, the major contributor is human activity.

The ten hottest years in recorded history have occurred since 1980. The five hottest consecutive years on record began in 1991. The planet is warming at a faster rate than any time in the last 10,000 years.

What is the greenhouse effect?

The "greenhouse effect" is essential for life on Earth. About 1% of the gases that are naturally in the atmosphere are greenhouse gases, which serve an important function for life on Earth. Heat from the sun beams down on the Earth and the greenhouse gases act like a blanket to keep some of the warmth wrapped around the planet. Otherwise all that heat energy would escape back into space. Without greenhouse gases, the planet would have an average temperature of -18 degrees Celsius or 0 degrees Fahrenheit. However, human activities are rapidly increasing the amount of greenhouse gases. The effect is like adding more and more blankets. As more heat is absorbed in the atmosphere, the temperature of the Earth rises.

What human activities contribute to greenhouse gases?



- ☞ The burning of fossil fuels (oil, coal and natural gas) which releases carbon dioxide, the most important greenhouse gas, into the atmosphere.
 - ☞ Deforestation, when wood is burned, the carbon contained in the trees is released as carbon dioxide. (Living trees remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.)
 - ☞ Cattle, coal mines, rice paddies, gas pipelines and landfills produce methane, another greenhouse gas which causes about 30% as much warming as carbon dioxide.
 - ☞ Fertilizers and other chemicals release nitrous oxide, which causes about 10% as much warming as carbon dioxide.
- ☞ Global greenhouse gas emissions due to human activity have grown since pre-industrial times, with an alarming increase of 70% between 1970 and 2004.

What are some effects of climate change?

Some expected and already experienced effects of climate change are:

- increased droughts and floods
- increased intensity and strength of tropical storms
- increased coastal flooding
- decreased drinking and freshwater supplies and availability
- increased intense heat waves
- increased wild fires
- massive extinctions
- ocean acidification and coral bleaching
- declining fish yields
- shifting growing zones
- increased soil erosion
- changes in the distribution of certain infectious diseases, including malaria.

“... it did matter to me a great deal in view of our common humanity, and in view of my love of the poor that I should do all I could for those whom He had loved so well.” *Mother Clare, Nun of Kenmare*

Who is affected?

Climate change affects all humans and all living beings on the planet. However, climate change is already having a disproportionate impact on poor people and poor countries. Changes in weather, extreme weather events, droughts, floods, and reduced crop and fish yields are being felt most in poor communities.

This is because poor people rely more on natural resources, are more vulnerable to disasters, and have fewer ways to protect themselves. Since, globally, women tend to do the jobs that are most affected by changes in weather, they often feel the greatest pressure.

What are mitigation and adaptation?

Mitigation is the reduction of the greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming and climate change.

Adaptation is the reduction of vulnerability to climate change impacts. Most rich nations are already developing strategies and investing in protection against the affects of climate change.

Poorer countries are often affected earliest and the most by climate change, but have the fewest resources and the least technological capacity to respond.

Industrialized countries bear the greatest responsibility for climate change. (For example, the United States is responsible for one fourth of the carbon dioxide emitted into the atmosphere.) The countries most responsible for the crisis, have a moral responsibility to help strengthen the adaptive ability capacity of poorer countries.

A practice or process is sustainable if it is able to be kept in existence, to be kept up, to be **maintained** or prolonged. *adapted from Webster*

Sustainability is an economic/ cultural state in which the demands placed upon the natural environment by all species and particularly human beings can be met without reducing the capacity of the natural environment to provide for future generations of the species.

The result of not living in a sustainable manner means that the capacity of the natural environment to provide for future generations of living species will be reduced. Some species will not be able to persist into the future because their requirements for life, i.e. habitat, food, air, water will be so diminished, polluted or degraded that this species will not be able to survive. This may include the human species. *Sierra Club*

In her own time, Margaret Anna Cusack (Mother Clare) made the connection between the devastation of earth and the victims of famine. “The ancient forests have been hewn down with little profit to the spoiler and to the injury in many ways of the native ... The country that was in ‘God’s keeping’ then has but little improved since it came into the keeping of man.”

Mother Clare, The History of Ireland

Sustainability is the **natural balance** and respect of humanity’s symbiotic relationship with the Earth’s natural ecology and cycles. **The capacity to endure.** The ability of an ecosystem to maintain ecological processes, functions, and productivity into the future.

adapted from Wikipedia

Sustainability means **meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.**

*“Bruntland definition”
(The most widely quoted definition)*

An **example** of sustainable farming that many of us are familiar with is **crop rotation**. Since some crops like corn consume lots of nitrogen from the soil, a farmer may alternate a year of corn with a year of legumes, which replenish nitrogen in the soil.

Crop rotation is a sustainable farming practice, because what is taken from the earth is then returned, permitting the soil to continue to nourish the plants that nourish us.

“In nature, the believer recognizes the wonderful result of **God’s creative activity**, which we may use responsibly to satisfy our legitimate needs, material or otherwise, while respecting the **intrinsic balance of creation**. *Pope Benedict XVI, Caritas in Veritate*

“We receive and celebrate all life as a gift from God by reverencing the earth’s resources and using material goods in a respectful and loving manner.”

Constitution 108

How can we live sustainably? Stay tuned!

Copenhagen Summit - Opportunity for Action

World leaders will gather December 7 to 18 in Copenhagen to discuss climate change. There is a sense of urgency around the Copenhagen Summit, also called "COP 15." Continued research indicates that climate change has reached a crisis stage.

COP 15 will be negotiating a new climate treaty to replace the Kyoto Protocol, a treaty in which signing nations agreed to specific reductions of greenhouse gas emissions. The Kyoto Protocol ends in 2012. The new treaty that will replace it will determine international direction and commitment in confronting climate change.

The United Nations General Assembly began addressing the issue of climate change in 1990. By 1992, increasing concern led to 154 countries signing the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Since then, 192 countries, including the US and UK, have ratified this document.

Annually, since the Climate Change Convention was passed, a meeting takes place called the Conference of the Parties or, for short, COP. At these meetings, nations discuss how they are achieving their goals to reduce global warming. COP 15 is the 15th annual conference.

Key essentials to be addressed in Copenhagen:

- ✎ How much are the developed, industrialized countries willing to reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases?
- ✎ How much are the major developing countries, such as China and India, willing to do to limit the growth of their emissions?
- ✎ How is the help needed by poor countries to engage in reducing their emissions and adapting to the impacts of climate change going to be financed?

For Further Information

About Copenhagen:  www.cafod.org.uk/copenhagen  www.sealthedeal2009.org

About Climate Change:  www.oxfam.org.uk/get_involved/campaign/climate_change

 www.cafod.org.uk/climatechange

About Catholics & Climate Change:  catholicclimatecovenant.org

 www.catholicsandclimatechange.org  www.chausa.org/climatechange

Action Suggestions in Support of Copenhagen

1. Sign the "Seal the Deal" statement (www.sealthedeal2009.org)
2. Send the "Countdown to Copenhagen" card you received at the assembly.
3. Send letters, postcards, and emails to President Barack Obama or Prime Minister Gordon Brown, urging them to attend Copenhagen, to commit to making at least an 80% cut in domestic carbon emissions by 2050, and to assist and help to pay for developing nations to reduce their emissions, develop cleanly and adapt to climate change.

Note: This resource is intended for CSJP use only